

*Have Time and Be Free*

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# *Have Time and Be Free*

*Toward the Organization of One's Life*

BY THEODOR BOVET, 1900

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TRANSLATED BY A. J. UNGERSMA



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# I    *"Time Is Money"*

Mankind searches for money, longs for it. Much in the same manner mankind seeks time and yearns for more. In one hour we hope to earn a definite sum of money, and with a sum of money we hope to gain a quantity of hours.

Our culture is oriented to the quest for money, to a money cult. It also focuses on the seeking of time, on a time cult. The man who runs eight hundred yards or drives ten thousand miles in the shortest time is the hero of the hour. Whoever builds a machine that produces a hundred more items per hour is known as a great inventor and earns a large amount of money.

Thus we no longer are free to arrange or dispose of our time; rather, the machine dictates the tempo of our life. We must hurry; for the plane leaves at 10:53. The laborer has to work overtime in order that production can be maintained. The craftsman has to motorize his workshop in order to meet competition. In order to pay for the new machines, he has to enlarge the market for his products, produce

more efficiently, and work much harder. This in turn forces other producers to keep pace if they are not to go bankrupt. The slow driver on the heavily traveled highway is a serious obstruction to traffic, and similarly, the man who will not speed up in our society is read off as obsolete. We all hurry and are harassed, involving others with us in our harassment. Paradoxically we point to our lack of time with a certain pride, like a businessman mentioning his large and rapid turnover of stock.

The result of this overvaluation of time is our panicky anxiety lest we lose time. We are much annoyed when we miss the city bus and have to wait six minutes, or when a customer does not show up at the appointed time, or when the telephone is busy just when we need it. Again and again we feel that the loss of time is just like the loss of money.

The lack of time and the hurried tempo of modern man has its source in the drive for success and security; its immediate consequences are excessive fatigue and the need for stimulation by alcohol, cigarettes, and other means. Then follows the familiar "manager sickness," and the sudden breakdown between the ages of fifty and sixty. Just one look at the obituary notices supports this fact.

Yet there remain people who have an abundance of time: patients in sanatoriums, unemployed who are on relief, soldiers with their weekend passes,



others who are retired or pensioned. The evaluation of time as money holds also for these, but it is to a certain extent devalued money, money in an inflation period. This money burns in the pocket and must be spent somehow, somewhere, as soon as possible. For this reason then these people spend their time playing cards, going to the movies, smoking, or working crossword puzzles.

Money has no value in itself, but only with regard to the things that can be purchased with it. Then, too, it can be treated as a fetish, the way a miser treats it, storing it useless and unused in a box. As long as we look at time as money, it also has no value in itself, but only with regard to the things with which we can fill it. There are also the time-greedy and the time-misers who save hours and minutes, and waste them uselessly in worry.

A person's anxiety about money has its parallel in his anxiety about time that lies ahead, the future. Indeed, all anxiety is perhaps anxiety for the future. This is based again on the fact that we perceive time as an empty room and we do not know how it will be filled. In order to put ourselves at ease we make plans for the future, we make provision for insurance, and we attempt to lift the veil of the future. But we do not even know whether in the next five minutes our hearts will still be beating. Time is impersonal and therefore we are anxious.

Now real time is absolutely different from the realm of money. It is not an empty space into which one can cram as many things as possible; it is not a yawning void to be filled up with amusement; it is not a coin for one's collection.

Time is much more a manner of living that is mysteriously granted to us. It flows along in its particular rhythm, then again it mysteriously ceases and is transmuted into eternal life.

The saying "time is money" is one of the most disastrous errors of our modern culture. If we would only free ourselves from this misconception, if we would get away from the curse of our great hurry and no longer seek merely to kill time, then indeed an extraordinary new time would appear.



## II *Is There an Art of Having Time?*

To escape the constant hurry and lack of time that are so characteristic of our age, a long list of methods is often recommended, and a number of ideas have been suggested.

There are, for example, the efficient persons who set up a program of work and carry it out with great determination. Whatever does not fit in with this program is ruthlessly shoved to one side; the time for enjoying pleasure and other such trivialities is strictly rationed. These persons doubtlessly accomplish an astounding amount of work; meanwhile, however, it is quite questionable as to how much happiness they, and especially their families, experience.

Diametrically opposed are the happy-go-lucky people. These would not be caught dead with any regularized program; they operate on the spur of the moment. They always have time for their friends, they are always available when one asks for them, and everybody likes them. And for this reason they can never keep an appointment, for it is usually canceled at the last moment by some other interest. A

project is lightheartedly begun, but never finished, because ten others have been started in the meantime and left half-completed.

Most of us find ourselves between both of the above-mentioned extremes, trying to accomplish a fair portion of the multitude of our tasks. One person will always try to do the disagreeable things first and for the most part never finish them. Another begins with more congenial tasks, and the less pleasant ones remain everlastingly unaccomplished. Some put in first place that which earns money; others seek honor, still others sympathetic understanding or erotic stimulation. The way we apportion our time is a faithful mirror of our inner selves, indeed often enough our unconscious interests.

Milani Comparetti proposes the following test: Let one make a list of the principle human interests (such as: family, friends, vocation, athletics, art, religion, social affairs, etc.). Then let him write after each category a number between one and ten, which will serve to show the value he places on it. Then in a second column is entered the time that one daily sets aside for the interest indicated. One would be astonished to see how greatly the values existing in our ideas and the actual time we spend upon them differ from one another.

All of the attempts to gain time have one thing in common. They look at time purely from a quanti-



tative aspect as though one had a certain amount of time to be divided among several spheres of activity. The apportioning may be done on a basis of duty, or cleverness, or casual inclination, but it does not change this quantitative way of considering time.

An example of this follows: In my ten-hour working day the following things *ought to* be done:

Consultations .....	6 hours	
1 house call .....	1 hour	
10 letters to be written ...	1 hour	40 minutes
5 telephone conversations .		20 minutes
1 article to be written ....	2 hours	
1 lecture to prepare .....	1 hour	
Professional journals .....		40 minutes
Bookkeeping .....		20 minutes
		<hr/>
		13 Hours

If I am to distribute my time on a purely quantitative basis, something is certainly clear: Either I must make up three hours in the evening or early morning, thus leaving too little for other things such as my family, friends, artistic interests, and so on; or, I must leave some items out of my daily program, those activities filling up the next day lest my professional work be neglected. All of us face this dilemma. Because we would indeed like to do one thing and not omit the other, to take care of the

patients, and yet not neglect the family, we grasp at the compromise of hurry and urgency. We save a little time with one patient, let another wait a little, and then we have place for a third appointment between the two scheduled; we come too late for dinner and carry on three telephone calls while the family eats; the evening lecture is prepared en route in the automobile and because of this preoccupation we barely avoid a serious accident.

In the same way that an unscrupulous business man is over-occupied with his money, we misuse time and thereby sacrifice a healthy life.

No solutions are to be found in this way. There actually is no solution. Life would seem to be organized in the wrong way. Actually one can live right only while on vacation. But in order to earn a vacation, one needs to do additional work and hustle still harder. It is just too bad that our family simply cannot comprehend this fact. Well, one day life will end. Then we shall have endless rest. What man in this modern age has not said something like this to himself at one time or another?

However, suppose that our way of calculating is false, that time definitely is not a quantitative amount of something with which one can calculate? It could be that time exists in a qualitative way, and one must comprehend it as such! If we ask, for example, how long it will be until the corn is full



grown, it depends a great deal on whether the question is asked in springtime or in the autumn. A general quantitative answer simply cannot be given here. In a similar manner it could be that our day or a longer period of time possesses its own characteristic structure, so that the duration of a particular job would be dependent on the moment in which it was begun.

For an illustration I am reminded of the well-known example of the suspension bridge that is scarcely shaken by a heavy motor truck. However, its total structure threatens to collapse as a result of soldiers marching across in step, when their step corresponds to the vibration period of the bridge. We all are aware that a certain type of activity, particularly creative intellectual work, is much more difficult and unsatisfactorily accomplished after a heavy meal or when one is tired. Yet in early morning or at other particular times such work is like play. For this reason the mentally "barren" times are especially suited for more mechanical work or just puttering around.

If I now take a second look at my work program with this qualitative idea of time in mind, then I can carry on my creative work (writing of articles and lecture preparation) far better and more quickly in time that is most favorable for it. If I answer my letters immediately, then I am saved repeated read-

ing of the letters. If these three items are dispatched at the propitious time, then I am neither tired nor tense, but in contrast I have a better disposition, "in the correct mood." Then I am prepared to carry on my office hours in better and shorter time. In this manner the unlikely feat actually can be accomplished—work which contemplated "in the abstract" would require thirteen hours to complete is performed not only in ten hours but also still better than seemed possible at first.

It is now pertinent to draw a first important conclusion from this discussion: There is no work "in the abstract," and no time "in the abstract." In contrast, time forms a living rhythm and our work should be organized to suit it. Therefore we cannot arbitrarily divide our time; it has height and depth, breadth and thickness, peculiar and changing coloring. Our life must be experienced as a harmonious wholeness, in relation to this kind of time.

The art of doing this exists in the perception of the peculiar structure of time, seizing the most appropriate moment for a certain task or a definite decision. This has been the goal of astrologers for thousands of years. More recently some believe that "bio-rhythmical" curves that dominate our time have been discovered. Modern man pounces upon these methods because he recognizes his lack of time. What might be valid in astrology will not be investi-

gated here. As a matter of fact the person who is confident of dividing up his time simply does not travel wisely. The structure of our time is so fine and so personal that any inflexible calculation of it is inappropriate; it must be comprehended by life itself. How that is brought about will be discussed in chapters to follow. Before we do that it is necessary first to penetrate somewhat deeper into the problem of qualitative time.



### III *Time—* *The Essence of Life*

*Life*  
All living things have this in common: They begin to live as an organism at a definite moment, they develop according to a very definite plan, acting and reacting in their environment, and finally as an organism they vanish. The permanent factor in this process—that which actually forms the personality—is not the matter out of which the organism is made; for this changes constantly during life, as is well known. It is not only the visible form which can be completely changed. One only needs to remind himself of the caterpillar and the butterfly or the development of the fern for an illustration of the changes just mentioned.

Far more characteristic of a particular organism and the constant factor in its life is the plan according to which it is formed and evolves—its time-phase (*Zeitgestalt*). If the eggs of a duck and a chicken were placed on a table they would appear similar, “as one egg is to another.” Even with exact chemical and microscopic analysis it would not be simple to explain the difference between the two. It is indis-



putable fact, though, that there hatches out from the one egg a duckling, and from the other a chick. The distinguishing element in the egg is its reference to a definitely appointed future. "Anticipation is the mode of living being—anticipation of itself as pre-determined" (Plessner).

Let us consider the appearance of two very similar old men. The essential difference between them lies not so much in the anatomical or psychological description one could give of them as in their differing past. Everything that they have experienced continues to exist in their present being, influencing their feelings and reactions. The living existence has as much reference to the future as to the past; therefore, it also has a present.

Inert or non-living things are determined by the material forming them. For example, a stone is characterized by its chemical composition or by its outer shape. A stream is determined by its bed or water-course. But such things have no "history" (*Zeitgestalt*), they come into being, they develop, they vanish. It really makes no sense to discuss the age of a stone, for its basic material already existed at the beginning of the world and will remain in varying forms as long as the world exists. Non-living matter is timeless, it has neither a past nor a future upon which its existence could be oriented. The dimension of time cannot be used therefore to measure the age

of the non-living things of the world, but only for regular movements such as those of the stars, the shifting sands, or the pendulum of a clock.

At one time when it was believed that the essence of life could be understood merely as a machine, the concept of time was completely equated with this dimension that is measurable with clocks. This was the quantitative concept of time which was discussed previously. Today when we have at least an inkling of the essential nature of living things, our inclination is in the opposite direction. The so-called inorganic world is now viewed as alive in the broadest sense of the term. Correspondingly, time lived is considered "actual" or "true" time (Bergson) whereas clock-measured time signifies merely spatial projection. This real revolution in our understanding of time has its source indeed in the renewal of modern physics that the theory of relativity brought about, and new concepts in biology, as well as the new philosophical deliberation of the last sixty years.

There is no objective time outside of ourselves; rather, time exists permanently in the living organism. "The world matures in this temporal life," asserts Heidegger in his inimitable way. There is no absolute time, but only indeed my time which consists in a discontinuous series of moments. Lecomte du Noüy refers candidly to granular time (*le temps granulaire*) which like light and other matter of our



first statistical perception appears to be constant, continuous. A practical example of this follows.

It is well known that the shortest "instant" among humans lasts about  $1/14$  of a second. As soon as more than eighteen vibrations a second contact our ear, we experience it by hearing a continuous tone. Sixteen to eighteen pictures per second give the impression of flowing motion. To snails, in contrast, the shortest moment is  $1/4$  of a second, while with fighting fish it is only  $1/30$  of a second. This "granulated time" also has a different span among differing varieties of animals. Furthermore, it is a fact of our experience that the same span of time, whether an hour or a day, appears to young men to be longer than it does to old men. This can be explained by the fact that the inner measure of time for old people has a slower tempo than that of young people, so that to them the clock seems to run faster. The same thing holds for those who sorrow and those who are happy.

It is significant that the modern physicist also believes less and less in an absolute, valid for all time. To assert that two events happen simultaneously is now impossible, because the exact establishing of this simultaneity cannot take place as a consequence of time and its relation to light signals.

The practical consequence of these observations could be shown in the following way: Time is not a hollow space existing in a vacuum in which we store

our effects in the most appropriate way that is possible; it is rather the most original form of our life. We cannot arbitrarily dispose of time as we do with a sum of money or a commodity; on the contrary, we need to discover its particular structure for ourselves, and thereafter aim at that, just as a rabbit has environment and capacities different from those of an elephant or a swallow, and thus it must adjust accordingly.

Time also is not an inexorable, austere, pace-maker governed by the swing of a clock pendulum, hurrying us through our life, demolishing our previous work, and finally conducting us to our death. It is much more our framework, according to which we unfold, and realize ourselves, and which finally guides us to another aspect and another time.

*That's  
exactly* Time gives our life the form that actually makes human life possible in the first place. Without time, all the events of our life would be crumbled together like those houses whose brick walls crumbled under bombing raids so that the concrete floors of five stories lay like pasteboard on top of each other. Time provides the correct distance between events, it gives us "space" to mature, and conceals from our eyes the future which might dismay us.


Because time belongs so essentially to our life we should not wish to charm it away so that we could predict the future. Our life would lose its frame-



work as a result, and everything then would become false. Indeed, we would not even make preparation for the next day; it is time that may be thanked that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," as well as the day's own joys and fulfillment.

While our culture appears increasingly to rush toward more de-personalization and rationalizing, modern science has made of time a matter of prime personal concern. There is no general automatic time. Each organism has its own time, indeed we all have each our own time.

The question often arises: Where indeed does life originate? If life is given to us by God, then it may be taken for granted that this personal time also is a gift. More correctly, one might say that time belongs personally to God, and that he loans it to us. In this way we can achieve an entirely new view of time.



## IV *Time Belongs to God*

Time that is measured with our clocks does not give a correct conception of actual time, for it is not a constant hollow space into which one can stuff the events of his life, one after another, like the books on a bookshelf. It is more accurately the personal structure of each existing life. On this basis we make bold to say that time like life itself is not our private property, but belongs to God and is loaned to us by him. If this is so, then it must also be so presented in the Bible. We shall now investigate this matter, with reference to the significant book of Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, which points out our way.

The Greek language of the New Testament acknowledges three different concepts that are usually translated as time: *aion*, *chronos*, and *kairos*. The last term is used most frequently. Its basic meaning is: "the essential period," above all, "the decisive period of time," "the God-given moment." Jesus sends a message to his host: "My time is at hand" (Matt. 26:18), or "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). In these passages the word *kairos* is used.

The Bible in general does not refer to a continual, fleeting, impersonal time. It speaks rather of a living time-aspect, time-form, in which there are height and depth, light and darkness, where a specific instant is decisive, where again in a long period nothing can be accomplished. That is what Jesus meant when he said, "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" (John 9:4). And Paul: "making the most of the time [using the propitious moment], because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

This teaching of the personal dependence of time upon God throws light on a fact discussed earlier, namely, that life presents prominent moments in which certain works can easily be accomplished, whereas other types are entirely inappropriate for that given time.

That there is such a thing as time at all and that it includes history is seen in the words of creation: "God spoke, and it was so." With these words time began. "The Word became flesh" means also "The Word became time," asserts Karl Barth, and still further: "God revealed himself" means "God has time for us." God's revelation is his inconceivable free-being (*Frei-Sein*) and resulting there-being (*Da-Sein*) or existence for us. This free-being and there-being indicate that God has time for us.

The coming of Jesus Christ, his dwelling among



us, his suffering under Pontius Pilate, and his second coming at the end of history—these are some of the decisive moments in the life of mankind, and in him is revealed the “time-entering God” who therefore is also Lord over time.

*Kairos* as used in the preceding discussion is an opportunity imposed on us by God; we can grasp it, but also fail. Jerusalem shall be utterly destroyed, “because you did not know the time (*kairos*) of your visitation” (Luke 19:44). “Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time (*kairos*) now for you to wake from sleep” (Rom. 13:11). It is very clear that *kairos* is not our own time that we choose and arrange for ourselves, but it is the commanded opportunity, a definite step in God’s previously conceived plan of salvation for mankind. Paul writes to Timothy: “For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time (*kairos*) of my departure has come” (2 Tim. 4:6).

All the events of the Bible are performed in this setting in expectation of or in fulfillment of time. A poignantly poetic and comprehensive statement of this can be found in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. True faith attaches itself to the security of our time in God: “My times are in thy hand” (Ps. 31:15).

Now some practical questions present themselves: How do we recognize this time of God for ourselves, how do we seize upon the given opportunity, how

can we comply with a definite plan? The correct adaptation to *kairos*, the experience of our time as Christ wills it, involves completely concrete obedience. God does not place before us simple, general demands such as "You must be honorable, helpful, and good." On the contrary he puts us in concrete situations with specific human beings—and says to us: "Here is your neighbor and you shall now love him and give him what he needs." God's will expresses itself always in the time of a specific moment. If we do not listen now, at once, perhaps the opportunity will quickly pass by. In this way God shapes the time of our life.

How is it possible to understand this time-entering will of God? We shall now concern ourselves with this question.

## V *If Man Listens, God Speaks*

Between people who love each other there exists a wordless communication that frequently is astounding. While a mother is busy with her household duties, she nevertheless has a keen ear for her small child who may be sitting in the room or playing outside in the garden. She notices immediately if he gets into trouble; ten childish voices may fill the air, but she hears her own child if he cries. The husband who tenderly loves his wife notices her weariness at once in the sound of her voice. The wife hears in the footsteps of her husband still outside on the street whether he is happy or cross. A young man who is traveling abroad, and finds it necessary to make a difficult decision, ceases speaking and listens within himself for what his father or mother might say about the matter. It can happen that the parents, though living several thousand miles distant, can in this moment sense something, perhaps feel that they should pray for their son, and that as a result he receives an effective answer.

If this kind of communication exists among peo-



ple, we can only experience it truly with Christ if we love him with all our heart. Then our ear would be permanently turned in his direction and we would perceive his voice among all the discordant voices of the whole world. Here too we can experience all the nuances from familiar logical deliberation up to inexplicable and wonderful guidance.

If we have the conviction that Christ is Lord of our time, that he has a definite design for this day as well as for our entire life that expresses itself in a series of *kairoi* of distinctive moments, then we can really become calm and listen within ourselves to learn what he desires from us in this moment, or in this decision, or for today.

A reasonable reflection leads us one point further—our knowledge of the commandments; it turns out to be a Bible passage that strikingly illuminates our problem. So far, we have not deviated from the norm.

Now it is possible to have a spiritual experience that many others have had before us, for it is not unique. When we think about Christ and call on him, it is not as though we were appealing to a dead or an absent person and deliberating about him: Christ answers, he has an effect on us, he is with us, he is alive. This is demonstrated in the fact that his will confronts us with increasing clarity as an absolute, complete, indeed foreign, will, radically different from

our own wills. In those moments when we begin to consider Christ, we usually would like to find in him the confirmation of our own personal will, that is to say his plan should bring ours to the highest degree of perfection. But his will emerges in an entirely different context, with a completely new viewpoint, in contrast to which our will appears to be permeated with trivialities and self-seeking motives. His plan is oriented on a world-wide scope, but ours revolves only in the circle of our own personal interests.

This abrupt antithesis of Christ's will to ours surprises us; we are vexed by this Otherness and are ready to abandon our plan without further ado. It can honestly be said that the characteristic of a genuine encounter with Christ is that our initial reaction is to be offended, and have nothing more to do with him. Yes, indeed, we were seeking Christ, but it was "our own little Christ" as he lives in our pious fantasy and fits neatly into our own plan. The living, vital Christ, however, he who goes his way to save the world, is totally other than our pious image of him. Our reaction to him repeatedly is to say: "This teaching is difficult, who can accomplish it?"

The immediate effect of this encounter is twofold: We attempt at first to evade it, doubting that Christ really has thus spoken, for we simply do not listen any more. We cling closely to the Christ-image that



we trust and which does not concoct any more surprises for us. All doubt of the possibility that Christ can be heard follows this strategy of evasion. However, if we are encountered by him, he does not let us go, and along with all our evasions he becomes more clearly known to us when something in us resists, when the deepest foundation of our reaction against him is our anger at him—all this is what is called sin.

When we try earnestly to hear Christ, the traditional image that we had of him is transformed unexpectedly in his personal presence which surprises us. Paralleling this is a transformation of ourselves: from people who believed they knew Christ and wanted to do only his will, to persons who do not really know him, who take offense at him and do not wish to do his will. In relation to the traditional picture of Christ we should like to be considered righteous with regard to the letter, to the law, to the image; however, in reality, in relation to the living Christ, we are nevertheless sinners. And the location of the greatest enmity is also the location of the greatest sin. Here God lays hold of our innermost self. Christ desires that I should tell the definite facts of illness to a patient; I resist this because I do not wish to be altogether truthful with this person. Christ would enjoin me from attending a certain movie, for I would like to attend it chiefly for the



purpose of arousing licentious feelings. Christ would prevent me from taking a lecture tour; I am annoyed over this, but I know down in my heart that I have undertaken it chiefly in order to build up my reputation and prestige. Christ thrusts me continually into the presence of a certain person; I wish always to evade him because I do not like him and cannot forgive him. Right at this point I need to be changed.

Through listening to Christ I cannot expect immediately to learn the design he has for my life, nor take for granted his guidance for my time. Rather do I need to be set free by him for that purpose. To acknowledge Christ as Lord of my time indicates a deep, comprehensive transformation of my life. When man listens, God speaks. However, when God speaks, something new is created, and I also am renewed. "Whoever earnestly seeks to pray, to the extent that his self-entangled spirit surrenders itself to prayer, steps outside of time."

Because this listening is so full of significance we shall proceed further along this pathway.

## VI *"Speak, Lord, Thy Servant Heareth"*

That God speaks to men is a fact that needs no further proof; the Bible, the history of the saints, and daily experience of believers sufficiently confirm this. It is astounding therefore to observe how many people make no use of this, indeed, they seriously question this speaking on God's part. The deepest basis for this rejection lies in our anxiety concerning the living God, and the personality reconstruction that this encounter demands from us. Another ground for this lies in a certain "technical restriction" of modern man, who does not know how to go about the matter of communicating with God. For this type of person we should like to suggest some "technical directions" which should be considered as fundamental rules. For the rest one would do well to consult the admirable book by Guardini: *Introduction to Prayer* (*Vorschule des Betens*).

The first thing necessary in order to hear God is to be quiet, silent. "Silence is the natural basis upon which the super-nature of faith is consummated" (Max Picard). Prayer is a dialogue with God; however,



we make of it for the most part a monologue during which we do all the talking, and rising as soon as we are finished. Kierkegaard states: "As his prayer became more devout and more from the heart, he had less and less to say; finally he was completely silent. He was silent, and furthermore, as a still greater contrast to speaking, he became a listener. At first he understood prayer to be speaking; he then learned that prayer is not merely being silent, but rather listening. And so it is: Prayer does not mean to hear oneself speaking—prayer means to become silent, to remain silent and to tarry until the petitioner hears God."

In our clamorous world, it is no longer simple to achieve such silence. The best time in most cases is in the early morning. This is also the most appropriate moment to view the time at one's disposal during the day. I am acquainted with people who arise each day before five o'clock in order to be silent in the presence of God.

It is necessary to have sufficient time at our disposal in order to listen to God out of the deep silence. Naturally, he can answer quickly a spontaneous, ejaculatory prayer, but one should daily hold at least a quarter of an hour free for listening to God—better still—half an hour, and on very difficult days, a full hour and more. He who can only spare a short bit of time and always watches the clock must not



think it odd if he hears nothing. In that case, he must get up earlier in the morning. One should not anticipate some supernatural revelations or mystical rapture from this prayerful silence. God should simply be petitioned to lead our thoughts and our wills, to clarify his design for us, and then, also, to help us surrender our own willfulness.

The first thoughts to emerge in this experience are often the usual daily concerns, a telephone call or a letter that we must not forget. It is a good procedure to write the letter immediately so that it no longer will bother one. Perhaps there next occurs a name, most often the name of some person that we have to do something about: We owe him something, or we have neglected him, or we just don't like him, or he is a temptation to us. We take note of it, for it is a reminder. Our thoughts then can be focused on the situation of listening. We find ourselves inclined to smile at all this, we do not willingly get up so early, something very disagreeable could occur to us. If we take note also of these ostensibly unimportant notions, we become aware of very concrete and important resistances: We discover suddenly what we really do not want to give up or surrender—our personal reserved area into which God may not penetrate. All this is preliminary to real listening for God's message. These are ideas which do not essentially differ from those produced

by the so-called free association of ideas in the course of a psychoanalytic interview. However, their effect is that of a psychological catharsis.

When we are relaxed in this manner, then thoughts gradually emerge that are strange to us, but nevertheless are convincing because of their inner correctness and their particular luminescence. The transition is usually not difficult to make in differentiating these ideas in their psychological aspect from the others, but now they are as relevant as the right key fitting a lock. It is as though hearing a beginner play the violin and then listening to an artist play a melody on the same instrument. Such is God's guidance. It is not possible adequately to describe this experience, but if one has experienced it a few times then one is aware of the difference. This guidance obviously can occur sometimes after a short silence, but only after some time in the course of which one's own thoughts have subsided. Also, one who devotes scant time to listening will not be able to learn this. And, finally, there are also days when we are so wrapped up in ourselves that we cannot accomplish it at all.

Now here are some questions which can help us to eliminate personal hindrances more quickly:

Am I afraid to hear God's voice? If so, why?

If God actually would say something to me, would I be ready, without any reservations, to do it?



Is there anything that God may not demand of me?

Is there somebody with whom I will not have anything to do under any circumstances?

Am I prepared to consider binding on me God's commands, as they are especially cited in the Sermon on the Mount? Where I have failed to meet these demands, can I soberly acknowledge this failure to be my sin?

What would it be like if all my thoughts and secret motives were to be visible from afar, as though projected on a movie screen? La Rochefoucauld states: "We would often be ashamed of our noblest deeds, if the public could see from what motives they arise."

In a specific dispute, do we not often ask: "Who is right?" rather than: "What is right?"

We must note: While God certainly speaks also to us, we dare not immediately assume uncritically that all thoughts which come to us in silence are godly guidance. Here it is necessarily indicated that we should write down these thoughts in order to be able afterward to consider them. (This kind of recording, at which so many people balk, was recommended by none other than Luther in his prayer instructions to Meister Spenlein.) It is therefore very informative to measure what we would like to consider as guidance against the yardstick of the chal-



lenges of Jesus. Often enough we will be able to detect our own ignoble or self-centered intentions hiding behind the assumed guidance.

It is important above all to share with a friend all ideas about what has happened to us in the period of silent meditation. The total character of our silence will be more fruitful and more concrete when we know in advance that we will share with complete frankness everything with our friend. Without something like this, a quiet time for myself alone would be frequently a mere self-contemplation. Such sharing of consciousness and discussion becomes the surest means of differentiating between our own ideas and God's will, of separating the chaff from the wheat. We resist such discussion even more than listening and writing down what we hear. But this resisted discussion could occasionally become a good confession. We can find twenty very good reasons why we cannot do it this particular day. From my own experience I must say the blessing of listening stands or falls with the regularity with which it is discussed with a friend.

It is important to repeat: All the above is no prescription and definitely no rule, but a personally tested demonstration. Above all: Neither a good "technique" nor an absolute standard can operate to make us righteous. We always live solely by the grace of God. Nevertheless, the forgiven sinner will

interest himself in doing at least what he can do, and as fully as he can.

Daily practice in listening to God is really the proper threshold to being “surprised by joy.” Whoever enters in earnest, steps into an entirely new life. We shall now see how this has an effect on our time.

## VII *Obedience Is Freedom*

"The commandment of God is the permission to live as man before God. The commandment of God is permission, thereby differentiating itself from all human laws, in that it offers freedom" (Bonhoeffer).

Nothing disturbs us more than genuine freedom. We are bound by convention, by respect for this or that influential man, we are bound by our unrestrained seeking for prestige, by our desire for gain and for pleasure, by our habits and prejudices, by our half-conscious anxiety and sickness. We are also bound by what we like to call "self-evident duty." We believe so many things absolutely have to be done, and in addition we do so many things because they are prompted by our secret motives, that our days and our life as a result are too short. Thus we perennially have the feeling that we get the worst of it.

It does not follow that one first should fulfill his duty, then satisfy his own desires, and finally in the time that remains listen to God. Generally not much time is left over. It should be the other way around:



first listen to God and place in his hands our entire time. Only then will we be able correctly to appportion our time.

With God, the person always comes first and, after that, things. Everything, even indeed the Sabbath, exists for the sake of mankind. It is not his will that we should be satisfied just to please people but that we should love them. Love is demonstrated in this way: to see another person as God intended him to be, to give to him what God wishes to give him. In sharp contrast, sentimentality sees people as I would like to have them be, and gives to them what they desire at the moment. Again and again we confuse genuine love with this sentimental desire to please people. When we please people and they call us good, then we think that we love them and have done God's will. In this way we spend much strength and time, in the long run just building up our own glory and thereby failing to reach God's goal for our life.

That is the way it goes when we go astray in concentrating on our calling, on our money, on daily worries, but especially when we lose ourselves in alleged concern for things. We all know the mother who is interested only in food, clothing, and the cleanliness of her children. She spends all of her time in these things and accordingly neglects the tenderness, the happy play, the spiritual rela-

tionship that the child needs far more urgently than those other things. We so often carry on in this way with those nearest to us.

But when I do that which God wishes me to do, then I have the feeling of fulfillment. Then the essential thing is done and everything else is secondary. It is remarkable how often a project that I formerly had conscientiously carried out proves subsequently to be unnecessary when I do not receive guidance for it. The realization of that which is essential for me is exactly what one means by freedom.

It is very difficult to follow our own personal inclination in this manner. For the most part, we consider reasonably what indeed would be "best" or "most useful." It is obvious that there are so many good and useful things to do that even with eighteen hours of working time we cannot accomplish them. We are perpetually overworked, irritated, and in addition unsatisfied. We call ourselves slaves of our work and we long only for our vacation. We would like to be good, honorable, helpful, and industrious, but we do not want to obey. The decisive axiom for the use of our time that I learned from a good friend goes: It is not so important to do as much good as possible, as to do what God requires of me.

If we do not remain simply at the level of this axiom, then we shall have a very typical experience;



if we do less than God demands, we become depressed; if we on the other hand do more than he desires, we become nervous.

To put it in another way, when we are depressed we could ask ourselves whether we have done everything that God requires of us. And then every time that we are nervous, tense, and overwrought, let us ask if we have not attempted more than God would have us do. No one can do God's will completely and at the same time serve his own will, his conventional duties, his own habits.

If we can get it through our heads that God does not expect us to be in two places at the same time, then we do not need to worry any more, and make further compromises. The rest that we cannot do doesn't make any difference.

If we earnestly seek to live in this way, then for the most part we will be able to get up earlier in the morning. We no longer will do a lot of things, because they separate us from God and therefore are sins. In this company belongs everything, above all, that works against love, whatever we would do at the cost of our neighbor or by deceiving him. We shall no longer do other things simply because we have not received orders to do them. It is possible that the crossword puzzle with which we kill time, the detective story which we use to read ourselves to sleep, and other more selfish indulgences belong



to these things. "Whatever does not proceed from faith [from union with God] is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

However, nothing would be more perverse than to believe that God is merely a schoolmasterish moralist who lays upon us unpleasant duties and forbids all joy. "The command of God is permission." He makes us free to do that which prepares us for joy, and when we seek completely after his love, that brings the greatest happiness to us.

When we yield ourselves completely to God's guidance, then he creates periods of tranquility for us. (The Sabbath and the sabbatical year are examples of the oldest division of time.) He enables us to sleep better, to be more alert when awake; he bestows on us an unusual capacity for work, and on the other hand time for "blissful idleness"; he challenges us to the last extremity, and gives us the deepest joy of the moment.

We are accustomed to have joy "in something," to be happy "about something," in connection with which this "something" is special and detached from the rest of life. Naturally then our regular life seems gray and joyless. True joy, however, does not come from "something" but rather from God. He outshines all things, even the difficult and painful, just as the sunshine throws a golden light over everything, be it the dunghill beyond the house or a ruin riddled by shell-fire. God does not carry us off to

regions out of this world so that we can take pleasure in pink clouds and happy angels; he gives us actual joy in our everyday life, at the workbench or kitchen stove. True joy is unfathomable, for it flows from God himself. It exists prior to all things, and it catches up within itself all things, one after another.

"Man no longer has any time for genuine encounter, and he has no time because he no longer has love. Love and time belong one to another. God sent his Son into time because of his love for mankind" (Max Picard).

What becomes so difficult for us to do is to yield ourselves completely to God and to believe that he cares for us more tenderly than a mother, that he forgets nothing, but knows our needs far more exactly than we do ourselves. All would be solved if we could only genuinely accept one saying of Jesus: "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

I know people who honorably survived the period of famine as long as they listened to the voice of God, step by step, and shared everything that they had with others less fortunate. I know others who both in the war and during flight from the enemy were again and again wonderfully led. Nevertheless, God's guidance is not to be considered a form of insurance against all mishaps. He can also lead us through the most agonizing experiences, as Jesus

promised his disciples, but he sustains us in these experiences and does not withdraw his hand from ours.

Finally, if we no longer fear death, then we are indeed free, and no one can do us any harm. But if our body shudders over the thought of death, then this freedom is denied us. In order to calm or soothe ourselves, we make one compromise after the other and we are always unlucky. Yet God has a way that needs no compromise, because with all of our anxiety and all of our faint-heartedness, he gives us his consolation. And in this way he makes us really free.



## VIII *God's Great Plan*

When we trouble ourselves to listen for God's guidance we will have the characteristic experience that our field of operation is already prepared. In the New Testament book of the Acts of the Apostles, three events illustrating this are related. Philip receives the order to proceed along the lonely road from Jerusalem to Gaza; there he meets the treasurer of Ethiopia, and converts him to belief in Christ (Acts 8:26-40). In Damascus, Ananias receives instructions to go to Saul who has been met by Jesus on the road; Ananias heals and baptizes Saul (Acts 9:10-18). The Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea and Peter in Joppa receive, independently of each other, reciprocal directions which result in the conversion of the first Gentile to Christ (Acts 10). These striking and wonderful stories match the experience of many thousands of people who wish seriously to do God's will.

There exists a mysterious correspondence between this listening to God and finding the open door, and

the granting of our prayers by God. All are extraordinarily bound together. Saul prayed as Ananias received the vision ordering him to go to Saul. Also, Peter prayed as he received the vision on the roof of Simon's house while the angel said to Cornelius: "Your prayer is heard." What is involved here is a genuine dialogue between God and man in which each answers the other. Furthermore, this dialogue is actually a cooperative affair as Paul expresses it (1 Cor. 3:9).

Emil Brunner states in his sermon on the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-7): "Prayer means, if one considers it properly, to participate in that which God brings about. God does on account of this prayer something that otherwise he would not do. That is most audacious, a truly shocking idea. And this impropriety, this shock, ought to be conveyed to us in this parable. I will put it in this way: God is pleased when you besiege him with your prayer, for then he observes: Now they believe me, that I love them, that my heart is great enough to know each of them, indeed, to know better than anyone knows himself. Now they note this and believe that they are able to participate in my work as though in my workshop, at my side. The total revelation of the Bible is given to us for this reason, that we may learn from God how tremendous an interest he has in each one of us."



It is idle at this juncture to inquire about cause and effect. God's activity is detached from the category of causality, and when a person stands "in God's workshop, at God's side," then his prayer, like obedience, points beyond causality.

This does not necessarily indicate that one cannot come somewhat closer to this mystery with other categories. One can draw upon telepathy and clairvoyance for partial enlightenment, or one could apply with Pascual Jordan the concept of complementarity or with C. G. Jung the idea of synchronicity.

Then many miracles would be "explainable," miracles that science until now simply believed it to be necessary to deny. However, does a string quartet lose something of its charm when I explain that it is the rubbing of horse hair on catgut strings that makes the music audible? The technical explanation of phenomena is one thing, the underlying creative intelligence is quite another thing.

It does not alter the fact in the slightest that man carries on a dialogue with God and that out of their cooperative work there flows the "fulfillment of time."

Time belongs to God. He bestows it upon man at his birth, in order to create and work mutually with man. When man accepts God's plan, he fulfills his deepest vocation and meaning, and thereby he be-



comes free. Instead of this, however, man snatches time from God's hand and prefers to keep it all to himself. Indeed, how will he utilize this impetuously siezed time when he has lost the meaning of his life? He haggles, bargains, and deals with it as with a commodity and says: "Time is money." He fills this time up with bold exploits and with plunder and never strikes a balance, for he always has too much or too little time. He cannot comprehend its true character, and supposes that it can be measured with the pendulum swings of a clock. Finally, as with all unknown and false things, he makes an idol out of it, an idol that saves all, conquers all, and heals all wounds.

Nevertheless time belongs to God. When we receive it from his hand, it brings to us hour after hour that we honestly need; when we listen to him we live hour by hour in a way that concurs directly with his great plan. Then everything is wonderfully joined together. It is like the trains of a great railway system that travel punctually according to the schedule, like the insects which pollinate the right flowers and are nourished by their honey, like the world-wide migration of the swallow or the salmon, like companionship of man and wife in marriage; in a similar way the events of the obedient life harmonize with each other. Time is the fabric that God and man weave together: God tightens the warp, man the

woof. But how will this be accomplished if man will not accept God's warp?

Every person who is obedient in his place, who even in his modest situation entreats God to give him a pure heart and preserve him, who is more particular about the motives back of his deeds than their outer success—such a person is working in God's kingdom. For this consists in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

## IX *The Time of Mankind*

The great purpose of God involves far more than our personal salvation. In the first word of the gospel the angel announced great joy which all people were to experience. The last word of Jesus before his ascension commanded the disciples to preach conversion among all people. It does not follow that I become holy; it does not follow that a small band of the elect persevere to the end; it does not at all follow that the Church of Jesus Christ shall endure gloriously to the end; but rather it is certain that God's sovereignty shall come, and his will shall be done as in heaven, so also on earth, in the whole world.

At this present time what is the situation of mankind? Most individuals covet what they do not have and have anxiety over what they possess. They are embittered over having suffered injustice and on account of this they are unjust toward others. Their attitude toward their neighbor is self-interested; as a result they are distrustful of him. The situation



of people in general is very similar, but even more pronounced.

Anxiety, greed, bitterness, and mistrust drive them on to secure their own advantage without being concerned over others. They consider this to be their sacred right, indeed, their sacred duty. Their conscience is put at ease, for a so-called ideology, developed from their material situation and in accord with it, proves to them that they are in the right, and the rest are wrong. Thus, the nationalist sees only the right of his state; right is what is of use to him. The capitalist sees only the right of his interest-group, and all means are for him good if they advance his interests; the Communist places his concept of right above all others, and he is ready to do away with everything that stands in the way of this.

These ideologies today have largely replaced the contemplation of God's will. Their tremendous danger lies in the fact that they are "ideal" and "logical," that they fashion for themselves a closed world view, which indeed means a mere projection of a given materialistic situation. This was correctly perceived by Marx. The result is that a person with an ideologically fortified conscience ruthlessly misuses the individual. The nationalist misuses his love of country in order to conquer other countries. The capitalist uses his power and peoples' hunger to

reduce them to robots. The Communist misuses bitterness and genuine poverty in order to destroy the opposing institutions and to rule in their place. Thus the lonely individual is increasingly endangered from all sides, and for his own protection he has to sell his soul to a system and assist himself with compromises.\*

Whether we are nationalists, capitalists, or Communists, we are affected by their ideologies, and without our noticing or desiring it we are driven like cattle in one or another economic and propaganda system, thus helping to enlarge the number of the apathetic followers. Because of all this we are no longer free. Our time no longer belongs to us but instead to the system. We have in its place the harassment and restlessness which was described in the introductory chapter of this book.

The only way out of this chaotic situation is the acknowledgement that God stands in the center point of the world and that we must listen to him. The situation in which we then find ourselves involved is no longer a nation or class or race: it is transmuted into the situation of mankind in the presence of its Lord. The attitude that consequently results from this condemns no one, but rather it embraces all. It does not ask who is right, but what is right. It does not justify one group over another;

\* Tr. note: Cf. *The Organization Man* by William H. Whyte.



conversely each one asks himself what he has to give to the other. It does not emphasize contrast or opposition, but shows forth continually the main point that all members unite to form one whole body. Many of these ideas correspond to the program of "moral rearmament." They remain the more valuable if one does not subscribe to certain other program elements, so that this genuinely Christian attitude will not be classified as another "ideology."

Today more than ever before, it follows that freedom comes from obedience and understanding or recognition of *kairos*. If a whole nation, indeed if all mankind, is to be converted, it can happen only in this way, that millions of people listen to the same voice and experience as a result the fulfillment of their deepest needs. All dictators know this and make the attempt to imitate it artificially; but the powerful political pressure from the outside always leads only to division among the people and to a dreary emptiness of the heart. An actual, basic, and lasting revolution that does not originate in reaction can only result from transformation of the heart that listens to God's voice. God accomplishes the miracle of this revolution. "To hope for a change of the person is a matter of faith, to hope for the change of society without a change of the individual person is nonsense."

The revolution of the solid, simple, devout fellow-



ship through the love of God is an eternal concern on which has been focused the interest of Moses, the prophets, the medieval founders of monasteries, the reformers, Savonarola, and William Penn. If we also take up this struggle, we are united with them all. But today the struggle probably has entered into a decisive phase, in that the predominant ideologies are provided with such violent means of destruction that the world thereby either will be destroyed or it will consider the fact that we are all children of *one* Father, and that it is important to recognize his will for everyone. This great saving revolution depends largely on us.

Let us be clear about this, that every single person, whether he wills or not, works like yeast and leavens the whole loaf of bread. Is he good yeast or tainted? That is the question. Each teacher, each worker, each statesman, who does not listen to God, but rather is bound to a divisive system, denotes great danger for many. On the other hand, every housewife, every laborer, or every doctor who listens to God, disseminates love, joy, and peace round about himself, and God accomplishes through him his triumph in the world.

Our want of time, our universal anxiety, is an important factor in the disruption of the family. Since the parents have too little time for their children, the children become uncommunicative indi-

vidualists, outwardly bold, but inwardly perishing from longing. Now there is no more advantageous encouragement for totalitarian systems than such individualism in susceptible families, and dictators of all kinds find no more willing customers than people who cannot tolerate quiet, free, silent time. By way of contrast there are healthy families that form living cells of all actual social and democratic communities. In view of this, the matter of having time indicates an important factor in world politics.

God is for us "time realized," "time come into existence." He helps us to progress in all our relationships and has spoken to the worker as well as to the big businessman, to the theologian as well as to the servant girl. He has assigned everyone to seek first after his kingdom and his righteousness; all remaining matters will be then considered. Then our time is ample and fulfilled, and it bears much fruit.

However, that is not his last word. God's time is eternity.

## X *Time and Eternity*

Time and eternity are not mutually exclusive contrasts to each other. "Time is also eternity, the flying eternity whose wing-strokes man can hear, whose strokes he is able to count," states Gotthelf. If we no longer believe in an absolute world-time, and understand that each living being has its own time-formation (*Zeitgestalt*), then we can express it in this manner: Eternity is the time-formation of God.

God has become flesh in Jesus and simultaneously he also became time. The life of Jesus had a time-formation that covered a span of over thirty years, and at the same time he is the eternal who was with God at the beginning and shall be at the end. Through Jesus, God is present in time and in Jesus, man has a stake in eternity. This is the sole opportunity presented to him here and now. "The eternal God . . . takes an eternal interest in his (man's) being in time, precisely because of his transitoriness, not a mere passing interest, but a lasting, continuing, faithful interest." "The life of Jesus came to an



end once, and hence his time also once became past. It came to an end in reality since it is constantly present, continually future. The man Jesus was because he is and continues to be" (Barth).

This internal coupling of time and eternity in mankind denotes that we do not live merely in the type of existence of creatures such as plants and animals, but simultaneously in God's eternal interest. This means that all things of decisive significance for every creature, such as eating, procreation, dying, are under certain circumstances unimportant. "Is not life more than food?" (Matt. 6:25). "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12). "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). These thoroughly "unbiological" sayings should not suggest that God demands superhuman effort from us, but that there is a "super-nature" that is not unnatural for mankind.

For mankind there are things that are of fundamental significance though they appear to be unimportant biologically. Among these are the pure heart (Matt. 5:8), the purity of motives (Matt. 6:3), or the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3). These are the unconscious things which to a certain extent form the warp-threads of time, while conscious deeds and thoughts signify the woof-threads.

It is therefore extraordinarily important to live

our time rightly. Not only is it important to have noble thoughts and to do good deeds, but also hour by hour and minute by minute to do exactly what God would have us do, whether or not we understand the purpose or whether it correlates with our biological needs.

We can do something and simultaneously desire to attain something else: the mixed motive. We can do two things at once that more or less support each other: the compromise. We can say one thing and do quite another thing: hypocrisy. We can think something and then do nothing about it: "faith without works." The sole thing that we can give completely, but only once, is our time. The hour that I live under the guidance of God belongs entirely to him and has his eternal interest; the hour that I do not freely give to him is irretrievably lost.

Indeed, if no sublime thoughts or profound meditation are demanded of us, we shall not be capable of finding the standard of eternity and building upon it. Our opportunities appear in a much more prosaic fashion and are quite contemporary: Give the hungry something to eat! Give water to the thirsty! Welcome the stranger! Clothe the naked! Visit the sick! Go to those in prison! If we grasp these God-given possibilities and simply obey, if we completely fulfill our earthly time, in that we show love to the person who at times is nearest, then one



day we might hear to our great surprise: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." At this point our time has become eternity.

The past is finished, elapsed time. God continuously grants to us, however, as long as we live, the present moment. This is our actual time, where we can produce, where we can find deep joy that should fulfill us, where we take up the cross that Jesus offers us along with his fellowship. When we are obedient in this moment, in this our time, then it is also God's time, it is also eternity. In the present moment of the self-seeking person, time melts away, vanishes; for the obedient person, by way of contrast, time and eternity merge in the moment. "The absolute is instantaneous obedience" (René Guisan).

Then and only then will we be able also to view the future without anxiety. For it holds only God's will for us, and he includes us increasingly in his eternity. It will no longer be the dreaded question mark, the black veil which we would so gladly lift, the constant threat behind which death waits with finality. Rather, the future is the way into eternal life, paved with fulfilled moments.